

PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

9111

(1987)

Studies have shown that reaching children of preschool age with a fire prevention message is essential in our effort to reduce fire occurrence. Work with preschool children may reduce a major source of wildland fires caused by children from kindergarten to second grade.

The preschool child (generally under age five) may attend classes at nursery, day care centers, or other preschool institutions. The objectives of teaching fire prevention to these children are to make them aware of the dangers and consequences of playing with fire. This age group is particularly hard to reach because of their limited ability to absorb formalized instruction. These children can absorb a great deal, but special attention must be taken in preparation for a preschool program. Because vocabulary and word understanding is limited, words must be chosen carefully to ensure communication. Special consideration must be given to development and use of very simple fire prevention materials that will attract and hold the interest of a preschool child.

The teacher has knowledge of his/her students that can help you build your program in accordance with their special needs. Contact the teacher to discuss areas that he/she feels would be of interest to the children. Keep in mind the fire prevention message you wish to convey.

PRESENTATION TECHNIQUES

9111.1

(1987)

Preschool children are just beginning to learn what goes on about them and may have mistaken concepts. Preschoolers test their concepts in many ways. Dramatic play and talk are ways of testing what they have seen and heard. Discussing their ideas with adults is one of the most effective ways preschoolers clarify their concepts. Your own first-hand experience is helpful and should be included when you talk to preschoolers.

We can help these children develop correct concepts of fire prevention by using the following methods:

- Give simple information.
- Give a little at a time because too much will be overwhelming and will not be absorbed by a preschool child.
- Answer all questions from these children to their satisfaction.
- Help them identify your instruction with something with which they are familiar and build on what they already know.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

9111.2

(1987)

The type of program you use will depend a lot on suggestions that come from the teacher. However, you should consider the following points:

- Lectures may be used, but keep them short. Formal lectures are the least effective means of communicating with preschool children.
- To increase understanding of your instructions, include items the child can touch and see. Animated films are particularly good for this age group. Films may be obtained from CDF's film library.
- Simple fire prevention materials should be used and thoroughly explained to the children. The initial fire prevention session should be brief, no longer than 10 minutes. You may build on the first session later by slowly adding additional items to your program. Briefly remind the group what you talked about last time.

SPECIAL TECHNIQUES

9111.3

(1987)

There are special techniques that can be used with preschool children. These points may further help identify your instruction with the preschool child. You can make yourself a part of the class and make the children feel at ease with you if you do the following:

- Sit on the floor with them or be on the same eye level.
- Pass your badge around.
- Bring items which you will be talking about to help them better understand your instructions.
- Use visual aids whenever possible. Use large images.
- Move slowly; do not use rapid movements.
- Speak slowly in a quiet and calm voice.
- Introduce a few ideas at a time; be sure they are understood.

Hold outdoor sessions when appropriate and describe the natural resources around you. Plan field trips and visits to areas where the children can identify with your instruction.

Preschool children are learning to get along with people. They will do things that are unexpected by adults not trained in teaching these children. This does cause special problems for a fire prevention instructor, so be ready to cope with the unexpected. Rely upon the teacher to help handle any problems that arise. Do not become too concerned with inattention by a preschool child because this may be common. Try to get class attention by changing your approach if you feel their interest is straying. Do not worry or become concerned about a child who continually interrupts. The child may be testing the concepts of which you are speaking, or he/she may just be showing off!

POST PROGRAM

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Provide the teacher with printed materials and other techniques that will allow follow-up on what you presented. These items should include Smokey Bear materials, a written outline of additional subjects which the teacher may use to continue fire prevention teaching, or a visit to your fire station. To gain parent participation, send fire prevention materials designed for adults home with children.

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